Is it possible to harmonise European dietary guidelines?

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Summary

• What are dietary guidelines?
• Why are dietary guidelines important for policy?
• What do European stakeholders think about dietary guidelines? A EURRECA interview study
• Challenges for dietary guideline harmonisation across Europe
What are dietary guidelines?

• Definition debated but broad agreement that dietary guidelines...
  o Are statements that promote nutritional well-being for the general public
  o Use nutrient and food-based terminology
  o Consider habitual dietary eating patterns + dietary reference values

“Adults – no more than 6g salt/2.4g Na/d”
What are dietary guidelines?

- requirements & reference values
- dietary guidelines & goals
- FBDG & food guides

**UK DRV**

- Adults
  - \( \leq 6g \) salt/2.4g Na/d

**NL food guide**
Why are dietary guidelines important for policy?

- Policy development, implementation and evaluation:
  - Benchmarks for monitoring, surveillance & compliance e.g. NDNS, food intake, food composition, catering...
  - Interventions & consumer communication e.g. food-based dietary guidelines & visual food guides (school education, food labelling...)

  “Total Fat <= 35% of food energy”
What do European stakeholders think about dietary guidelines?

- **EURRECA study background:**
  - European Commission encouraged multi-stakeholder involvement to establish consistent health promotion
  - European Food Safety Authority consultation on European food-based dietary guidelines

The Danish 8 diet tips
- Eat fruit & veg. 6 pieces a day
- Eat fish & fish products several times a week
- Eat potatoes, rice, pasta & wholemeal bread every day
- Limit the intake of sugar, particularly from soft drinks, confectionery & cakes
- Eat less fat, particularly fats from meat and dairy products
- Eat a varied diet & maintain a normal weight
- Drink water when you are thirsty
- Engage in physical activity at least 30 minutes a day
Aim/method

• **Aim:** Explored European stakeholder beliefs about dietary guidelines

• **Method:**
  - 77 qualitative semi-structured interviews
  - Countries = CR, DACH, ES, NO/NNR, SR & UK
  - Stakeholders = government, scientific advisory body, professional/academic, industry, NGO

[Image of The eatwell plate and UK food guide]
Results - terminology

- Terminology variety
  - Food-based dietary guidelines (Danish tips)
  - Food guides (Greek pyramid/ UK plate)
  - Nutrient/dietary recommendations (6g/d NaCl)
  - Dietary reference values (UK RNI)
  - Guideline daily amounts/traffic lights (industry)
  - Translation - Serbian “preporuke” recommendation vs. Croatian “smernice” guidelines

“Sugars (added) \( \leq 11\% \) of food energy”
Results - content

- Content variety
  - Nutrient based (saturated fat)
  - Food-based (fruit & vegetables)
  - Nutrient & food-based
  - General e.g. energy balance and/or + non-diet (physical activity, sustainability... )

CZ food guide

Food, Consumer Behaviour & Health Research Centre

eurreca
EURopean micronutrient RECommendations Aligned
Results - purpose

• Purpose variety
  o Health promotion advice e.g. general public food-based dietary guidelines & food labelling, school children education or for education for special groups (athletes/ diabetics)
  o Government/health professional monitoring tool
  o Food industry compliance tool

“Fruit & Vegetables >= 5 portions (400g) of a variety of fruit and vegetables per day”
Challenges for dietary guideline harmonisation across Europe

• Terminology clarification possible? Ambiguity due to variety of audiences & uses

• Content harmonisation possible/useful? Country differences e.g. cultural food practices, food availability, diet-related health problems, scientific approach, government priority in public health agenda

• Share best-practice & align process rather than content (EFSA FBDG document)?

• Common aim possible? Clarify purpose & measure effectiveness of dietary guidelines?
Thanks to all FCBH & EURRECA colleagues!


Brown KA et al. (2011) Micronutrient recommendation stakeholders' beliefs on dietary guidelines: a qualitative study across six European countries/regions. EJCN, 65 (7): 872-874


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Thank you for your attention!